

Moving Forward



As early as the 1860s, prospectors began flocking to the Summit Valley in search of wealth and opportunity. They found the “richest hill on earth” with an ore body that would support an industrial revolution and help Allied Forces win two world wars. All told, more than 1 trillion pounds of metals—including copper, zinc, molybdenum, silver, and gold—have been pulled from the Butte Hill, sustaining generations of dedicated miners and the proud community they still call home.

Past methods of underground and open pit mining, and the processes employed to extract and produce the saleable metals from the ore, altered the landscape and left behind enormous deposits of waste generated in mining, milling, and smelting operations that ceased decades ago.

The Anaconda Copper Mining Company (Anaconda Company) was formed in 1895 and became the dominant mining company in Butte in the early 1900s. Atlantic Richfield Company (Atlantic Richfield) purchased the Anaconda Company in 1977 and merged with it in 1981, thereby acquiring Anaconda Company’s mining operations in Butte and the environmental conditions arising from Anaconda Company’s past operations.

Since that time, much has happened. Following the passage of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act ([CERCLA], also known as the Superfund law) in 1980, Atlantic Richfield has worked under EPA orders and directives to actively reclaim and revegetate hundreds of acres of abandoned mining landscapes across the hill; remove more than one million cubic yards of tailings and wastes from the banks of Silver Bow Creek; and capture and treat billions of gallons of contaminated groundwater. At the same time, EPA, the State of Montana, Atlantic Richfield, and the Butte-Silver Bow County government have been working to resolve long-standing disputes over environmental liabilities and the scope of remedy and restoration in Butte. If these disputes are not settled, EPA is likely to issue a unilateral administrative order requiring Atlantic Richfield to perform the next phase of work required under the 2006 record of decision.

If the proposed remedy is adopted, it will provide a path to close this chapter of Butte’s history. The EPA and the state, working collaboratively with local Butte-Silver Bow government and Atlantic Richfield, have developed a proposal for a final phase of remedy work that could be incorporated into a consent decree for the Butte Priority Soil Operable Unit (BPSOU). We are pleased to share the proposal with the community to provide you with more information and to get your initial comments and reactions to the proposal. The proposal focuses on these specific areas:

- *Blacktail Creek*
- *Buffalo Gulch*
- *Butte Reduction Works*
- *Compliance Determination Plan*
- *Diggings East*
- *Grove Gulch*
- *Insufficiently Reclaimed Areas*
- *Northside Tailings*
- *Surface Water Technical Impracticability Evaluation*
- *Timeline for Consent Decree*
- *Uncontrolled Surface Flow Areas*
- *Unreclaimed Areas*

Descriptions of the timeline, proposed remedial activities, the compliance determination plan, and the technical impracticability evaluation are provided in this package. The proposal provides a pathway for completing the remedy and integrating the state’s restoration actions with remedy at and near the confluence of Blacktail and Silver Bow Creeks. If completed, the proposed remedy work could enable EPA to begin the process to remove the BPSOU from the National Priorities List.